

# **Investigation Report**

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**Date of Report:** September 1, 2011

**Summary:** I was requested to investigate allegations against teacher Adam Priquette. Nineteen persons were interviewed by the investigator. Principal Scott Schumacher interviewed twenty additional students. Interviews were conducted at Manhattan Elementary School, and over the phone between July 12, 2011 and August 10, 2011. The function of an investigator is to act as a fact finder. An investigator also determines the credibility of witnesses, particularly when statements are in conflict.

## **Background:**

Around May 5, 2011, Principal Scott Schumacher received a complaint from a parent (Parent #1) that fourth grade teacher Adam Priquette gave their student (Student #1) a “v-notch”.

(Note: A “v-notch” is the act of placing pressure on the area where the collar bone meets in a “v” shape. A “vulcan grip” is the act of placing pressure behind the ears.)

Principal Schumacher convened a meeting with Mr. Priquette and his representative, and the parents of the student on May 10, 2011. At the meeting, Priquette denied giving a “v-notch” to the student. Subsequently, between May 18, 2011, and May 25, 2011, Principal Schumacher interviewed twenty students in the fourth grade and higher grades about whether Mr. Priquette gives students a “v-notch” or a “vulcan grip.”

## **I. Allegations**

### **Allegation that Adam Priquette applied pressure to the area between students’ collar bones, giving them a “v-notch.”**

This allegation can be substantiated. It can be substantiated that Adam Priquette has given students v-notches. It can also be substantiated that Adam Priquette gave Student #1 a v-notch, resulting in a red mark near his collarbone.

The day of the incident in which Mr. Priquette gave fourth grade Student #1 a v-notch, when Student #1 saw his mother after school, Student #1 was visibly upset and shaking. Student #1 had a red mark on the area of his collarbone. This red mark was witnessed by several district staff, as well as a police officer. Student #1 stated to the investigator that Mr. Priquette gave him

a v-notch. Student #1 stated to the investigator that, “I was smarting off to him, and he came over and did that to me. I was mostly embarrassed because people were laughing at me. I was kind of laughing too. It hurt. It feels like it clogs up your throat afterwards.” When asked why Student #1 was laughing, he stated “because that’s what you do.”

Student #1 stated that Priquette gave him a v-notch a second time that day. Priquette walked into another teacher’s room and said to the teacher, “your boy [Student #1] was smarting off to me,” and gave him a v-notch.

Priquette stated that he only gives students a “v-notch” to demonstrate what it is. Priquette denies that he has given a v-notch to a student without a student first asking for a v-notch. Priquette stated that he has never had a parent approach him about no longer giving a v-notch to their students, or putting their child in a Vulcan grip. Priquette stated that the incident with Student #1 was the only incident when a parent brought up this issue.

Adam Priquette is not credible on this point. Two parents apart from Student #1’s parents stated to the investigator that they had approached Priquette in the past and told him to stop giving their child a v-notch. Twelve students and one teacher stated that they have witnessed Adam Priquette give a “v-notch” to students by placing pressure on the area between the students’ collar bones. There is no evidence to suggest that the only time Priquette gives students a v-notch is when they ask him to demonstrate what it is. Additionally, Student #1 stated to the investigator that he did not ask Priquette to demonstrate what a v-notch was before the incident.

**Allegation that Adam Priquette applied pressure to the pressure points on students’ ears, giving them a “Vulcan grip.”**

This allegation can be substantiated. Ten students stated that Adam Priquette places pressure on the area behind students’ ears, giving them a “vulcan grip.” Priquette denies ever giving a student a “vulcan grip.” Priquette is not credible on this point.

**Allegation that Adam Priquette held a student over a trash can.**

This allegation can be substantiated. Several students and one teacher stated they witnessed Adam Priquette holding a student over a trash can. Additionally, Adam Priquette admits that he held a student over a trash can.

**Allegation that Adam Priquette told Student #2, a female student with a craniofacial anomaly that she had, “a face only a mother could bear.”**

This allegation can be substantiated.

Student #2 remembers Priquette making this statement. The parent of Student #2, (Parent #2) recalls Student #2’s brother coming home to report this incident, and recalls that Student #2 was

upset and reluctant to talk about the incident. Principal Scott Schumacher recalled Parent #2 coming in to complain about the incident. Schumacher took notes of the incident, and the notes indicate that Mr. Priquette admitted to making the statement. Mr. Priquette denies that he made this statement. Priquette is not credible on this point. It can be substantiated that Mr. Priquette made this statement to Student #2, a female student in his class.

### **Allegation that Adam Priquette Dumps Students' Desks on the Floor**

This allegation can be substantiated.

Priquette admits to dumping students' desks on the floor. Priquette stated that he did this if he had asked the student several times to clean their desk, and they were holding up the class. Priquette stated that the only time he has done this recently is when they were trying to find something in the desk, and that he helped clean it up. When asked if in times past he helped clean up the desk, Priquette stated that in certain situations he has helped clean up their desks.

### **Allegation that Adam Priquette engaged in misconduct related to the incident with Student #3, a student injured in 2000.**

#### **Background:**

On November 8, 2000, a student in Adam Priquette's class, Student #3, was severely injured during recess. Priquette was playing football with fourth and fifth grade students. The ground was frozen and hard, and covered in icy patches. Student #3 fell and hit his head. Student #3 was bleeding from his nose and both ears. Student #3 was initially taken to the hospital in Bozeman, and subsequently sent on life flight to Billings.

Student #3's mother, Parent #3, stated that after things calmed down with Student #3's injury, things got "a little bit strange." Parent #3 was approached by parents who said that their son or daughter saw the incident, and that Mr. Priquette landed on top of him, and that the rest of the kids piled on top of him. Over the course of the years, Parent #3 stated that people have gone out of their way to talk to her about the incident.

Parent #3 stated that she was in the Emergency room in Bozeman the day of the incident, and the nurse came in and said someone was outside and wanted to talk to her. Adam Priquette was there and asked how Student #3 was. Parent #3 stated that Priquette was concerned, but he was also nervous – almost in a panic. Parent #3 said she appreciated his concern, but that she needed to get back inside, and she would call the school and let them know more when she knew more. Priquette said, "just so you know, no matter what you hear, I didn't land on him." Priquette told Parent #3 that some of the kids said he landed on him, but he didn't land on him. Parent #3 felt that in hindsight, it was really odd.

A staff member was told by a student (Student #4) that Mr. Priquette “took him out” with regard to Student #3’s injury on the field, and that Mr. Priquette was “gunning for him (Student #3).” Parent #3 stated that all of the kids she heard from said that Mr. Priquette landed on him, but only Student #4 said that Priquette was “gunning for him.”

Priquette stated that he did not go to the hospital after Student #3 was hurt. Priquette stated that Student #3 fell down, he (Priquette) fell down, and two or three kids also fell down. When everyone got up, Student #3 was still down, and he was hurt. Priquette stated that he fell near Student #3, but did not hit Student #3.

It cannot be substantiated one way or another that Priquette intentionally tackled Student #3 on the field.

Priquette is not credible in his statement that he did not go to the hospital and speak with Parent #3. It can be substantiated, both through Priquette’s statements to Parent #3 at the hospital, and witness statements, that Priquette landed on Student #3.

### **Interactions with Student Athletes**

#### **A. Comment to a Female Student**

It can be substantiated that Priquette made a comment of a sexual nature to a female high school student.

Two staff members were in the hall when Priquette made the comment to Student #5, a female high school student. One staff member recalls that Priquette said, “hey sexy” to Student #5, and that Priquette was flirting with Student #5. The other staff member who was present remembers that Priquette called Student #5 a “blonde bombshell.” Priquette denies making either comment.

#### **B. Assistance on the track blocks**

Two staff members stated to the investigator that they were told by student athletes of an occasion in 2008 in which Adam Priquette stood directly behind Student #6, a female student, holding the student’s waist. (Priquette was apparently trying to demonstrate how to come out of the track blocks). Some of the students apparently took pictures of the incident on their phone, as they felt Priquette’s stance was of a sexual nature, as it appeared that he was “mounting” her from behind.

One staff member was told about the incident and stated she saw a picture that one of the students took on their phone. Another staff member stated that the student athletes told him about it after it occurred, and said they had a picture on their phone. The student, Student #6, does not remember an occasion in which Priquette was directly behind her. Student #6 stated that Priquette had to place his hands on her hips in order to show her how to come out of the

blocks, but that he always maintained a line of professionalism. Student #6 does not recall students taking pictures of Priquette standing behind her.

Priquette denies that he had his full body behind the student's body. Priquette stated that he is usually behind the back rung of the block. Priquette denies holding the students' waist and standing behind her in a sexual manner. Priquette does not remember students taking pictures with their phones of the incident.

There is insufficient evidence to substantiate that Priquette stood directly behind a female student athlete in a sexual manner and held her waist, in order to demonstrate how to come out of the blocks.

## **II. Other Allegations:**

These allegations were brought to the investigators' attention, but could not be substantiated one way or the other:

- Priquette called a male student who had long hair "a girl."
- Priquette made a child who cried frequently hold a baby doll.
- While playing football with students, Priquette "stiff armed kids." A student witness stated that Priquette once gave him a bloody nose from both nostrils due to Priquette "stiff arming" him.

## **III. Other Issues:**

### **A. \$500 in desk**

#### **Background:**

Approximately \$500 in cash was found in Priquette's desk after he was placed on suspension.

For the fourth grade field trip, the fourth grade raises money, and the money is deposited into the activities fund. Priquette stated that he does fundraising for the Yellowstone trip. To raise money, cans are collected, and there are candy and ice cream sales. Also, parents donate money. Priquette stated that he works with the high school office, and brings them deposits. The board follows MASBO accounting procedures, so those policies should apply to funds raised for activities.

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When asked how often deposits are made into the activities fund, Priquette stated that there is no set time, and that he tries to get it over there once a month. Priquette stated that he has never seen the MASBO guide.

When asked why there was \$500 in his desk, Priquette stated it was probably because he had not made a deposit. There was a check for \$100.00 from a parent, written to the order of “Adam Priquette.” In the memo line, it was for “Yellowstone.” Priquette stated that parents usually make the checks out to the fourth grade account. Priquette stated that he doesn’t know why there would be a check made out to him personally. When shown the check in question, Priquette stated that he would normally try and take it over to the school and ask what to do. Since it was dated “5-17-11”, Priquette stated that he probably did not have a chance to do anything with the check before he was placed on suspension. Priquette stated that he does not keep receipts for money received, and no one signs off on the money that comes in for fundraising. Priquette stated that he did not know this was supposed to be done.

It cannot be substantiated one way or another that Priquette engaged in misconduct with regard to fundraising for the fourth grade class. There was a substantial amount of money in Priquette’s desk, and the cash was not counted and checked off by anyone else. However, it does not appear that the district’s practice is to follow standard accounting procedures, as set forth in the MASBO handbook, which would include a second individual counting and checking off on cash received, as well as regular deposits.

## **B. Professionalism**

Many witnesses who were interviewed indicated that Adam Priquette does not observe appropriate boundaries between students and teachers. Witnesses stated that Priquette is often the one who instigates teasing toward students, causing students to tease other students about things such as kissing girls, and calling each other names. One parent witness stated that Priquette teased their child about kissing a girl, which caused the other students to tease him about this. The parents of this student wrote a letter regarding this incident, and Priquette wrote a response. Both the letter and response were meant to appear in Priquette’s personnel file. One witness stated that Priquette referred to a student with Asperger’s syndrome as “Ardvark.”

Other witnesses stated that Adam Priquette referred to students who don’t get their school work done as “burger flippers.” On one occasion, one of the students pointed out that was what the father of a student in the class did – he flipped burgers. Priquette allegedly responded, “Exactly. Is that what you want to be?” Priquette stated that he did tell a student, “Get your school work done. People who don’t get school work done could be students that end up working at McDonald’s.” Priquette denies an incident in which a student said, “That’s what X’s dad does,” and that he responded with, “Exactly. Is that what you want to be?” Priquette stated that he has said that is a good job for high school and college students.

Many witnesses stated that Mr. Priquette favors certain students in his class, and has a pattern of favoring male jocks, and pretty females. Witnesses also indicated that Mr. Priquette makes students who do not go along with “his program” feel that they are no longer part of the “club.”

Several witnesses indicated that Priquette crosses the line in expressing his favor for certain sports teams. Witnesses described instances in which Priquette made students turn their “Griz” clothes inside out, since he was a Bobcat fan, and instances in which Priquette would berate students about the teams of which they were fans, if they were not the teams he favored.